

# Pomona Cleans Up Movies—Restores Sunday

## A Town of 14,000, Near Hollywood, Too, Biffs Vulgar Dialogue and Lurid Sex Plays by a Very Simple Expedient; Screen Beauties Fizzle

POMONA has done it. Pomona has shown itself to be as "intolerant" and as "bigoted" and as "narrow" as may be necessary to preserve the decency of an American community. Pomona has voted

### "AN ORDINANCE

making it unlawful to keep open any theater, motion picture theater, public dance hall, pool or billiard hall, skating rink or other place of public amusement within the City of Pomona, on Sunday. Provided, that said ordinance shall not apply to programs, concerts and entertainments given by religious, benevolent, fraternal, patriotic and charitable societies, or other societies of like character where no admission is charged."

This is the answer of Pomona, California—by no means a Puritan community, by no means given to the "blues"—to the forces that ripped Sunday decency to shreds and then turned on the public opinion of Pomona and said, "What are you going to do about it?"

For, you see, they thought they had public opinion with them. The anti-American forces seldom become bold until, after a long preparatory course of propaganda, they think they have public opinion with them.

And in Pomona they did have a certain proportion of public opinion, nearly 50 per cent. The vote was 2,079 for the kind of an American Sunday the ordinance represented, and 2,025 against it. The margin is 54 votes. That is more than five times the number that could have saved Sodom and Gomorrah.

Pomona's action is something of a wallop, because the town is only 14,000 in population and is within "the sphere of influence" of the great motion picture center of California. No one ever expected Pomona to raise her hand against the pace that is being set by "the Fourth Largest Industry" in the land. Pomona wouldn't dare!

Maybe, under ordinary circumstances, Pomona would not have dared. But there are some things that even a "liberal" community cannot stand. Pomona likes fun. It had three movies and vaudeville houses which always played to capacity audiences. It was a "good show town." Until a short time ago the theaters there

**POMONA'S** experience tells one thing: that commercialized indecency in the amusement world fears the restoration of the American Sunday just as much as it fears the erection of a community censorship. In Pomona, the theatrical ring threatened that if they could not go the limit on Sunday, they would close down on week-days too. Sunday is both the goose and the goat; goose that lays the golden egg for the producers of vileness; goat of all the propaganda to make the people think that decency and the "blues" are synonymous. The Pomona Punch delivered at the polls is an object lesson to a number of indignant and apparently helpless communities. Pinch them in their Sunday profits and watch them wilt.

had been in the hands of Pomona people—home folks who didn't have the nerve to shove indecency before the eyes of their neighbors.

And then the situation changed somewhat. Gore Ramish and Sol Lesser came along and bought out two of the three theaters. Gore Ramish and Sol Lesser do not live in Pomona, but they are able to exert a great influence on a number of places where they do not live, because they own a chain of theaters on the Pacific Coast.

With the change of ownership certain other changes occurred. The price of theater tickets went up first. Then came a series of lurid sex shows, such as had never been seen in Pomona before. A series of vile vaudeville dialogues followed them, such as had never been heard in Pomona before. Pomona people went to their theaters, expecting to be "amused," and as the audiences had formerly been composed at least one-third of children under 16, lots of fun was expected. But instead of amusement came amazement. What did these men mean, setting those scenes before children? What did they mean, bringing on all that filthy talk for young girls and their mothers?

The manager of the vaudeville theater—a non-resident, of course, representing Messrs. Ramish and Lesser—was called before the city council and publicly reprimanded.

Public officials and welfare workers began to notice

**POMONA** is not a Puritan community, but it does illustrate the statement that if you want the old Americanism that made New England a sturdy liberator, you must now go to the western coast. The American conscience and the American sense of what is right and fit have moved west, they say. It may move back east again. Even in New York there is a silent host that has not acquiesced in the de-Americanization of that city. The spirit of Pomona may yet happily be seen in the Bronx. It is a fight, but it is a fight that can be won.

new manifestations in the conduct of young boys and girls, and the investigations led straight to the new class of plays that had come to town.

There was protest, of course—the helpless protest of the decent public who can simply say, "It isn't right; such things should not be allowed!"

The break seemed to come with a display of religious antagonism on the part of the theater management. It had always been the custom in Pomona whenever a public function, like graduation exercises, fraternal society home-talent show, or similar entertainment was given, to hire one of the theaters, and the theaters were always at the disposal of the people. So when there came revival meetings to Pomona and the interest grew, it was decided to hold noon-day religious services in one of the theaters.

The management was approached to make arrangements for the meetings, but the committee of citizens were thunderstruck to hear that the theater was denied them. They were told that not only could they not have the theater that time, but unless the churches stopped attacking the character of the pictures given at the show houses they need not expect any favors from the theaters in the future. There is something very characteristic about that ultimatum.

Pomona at last had its eyes open to the kind of force it was up against. It saw the whole scheme from beginning to end. The question went back and forth. "Who's running Pomona, anyway? Who has got hold of our town? Are we going to put them out, or are we going to let them put us out?" Pomona's liberalism began to tighten from that moment.

An initiative petition was circulated, the legal machinery set in motion; Pomona was prepared to deal with the anti-American forces in an orderly way.

It was a great campaign. Hollywood poured out its studio beauties to win Pomona back to normalcy. A number of dirty tricks were played, as is always so when a certain force in this country is antagonized. But the campaign went on.

It was conducted by two organizations—The Civic Betterment League, which was in favor of the ordinance, and The American League for Freedom, which was against it. The Civic Betterment League was the organ of the decent business men of Pomona. The president was a merchant and the secretary was a real estate dealer. It was financed by contributions from the churches and citizens who believed in a clean town.

The head of the American League for Freedom was the manager of the theatrical houses of Gore Ramish and Sol Lesser. The secretary was the manager of one of the theaters owned by Gore Ramish and Sol Lesser. Where its finances came from no one especially inquired, because everyone thought he knew.

Now about the Pomona newspapers—where did they stand? Well, for once, the forces represented by Gore Ramish and Sol Lesser did not have an easy getaway with the newspapers. This may not be wholly due to the newspapers themselves; there was a peculiar set of circumstances in Pomona just then. You see, the business men who advertised in the papers were in the Civic Betterment League; and the theatrical advertisers were in the American League for Freedom. The newspapers immediately rushed for neutral ground. It was rather a novel situation, that advertising should be so nicely balanced. In the great cities the forces represented by Gore Ramish and Sol Lesser, control 85 to 95 per cent of the advertising, thereby prohibiting the poor newspapers from supporting decency or even remaining neutral toward it.

The old arguments were used, of course. The "personal liberty" plea was lugged out of the old stock-room of previous "wet" campaigns, and worked to death.

The defenders of "freedom" hysterically told the people that if the ordinance passed there would be no more Sunday bathing, automobiling—no train service, no mail, no cigar stands, no drug stores. It was a doleful picture they drew. Anon they waxed heroic and declared the proposed ordinance to be a dastardly conspiracy to wreck the nation.

Gore Ramish and Sol Lesser, be it said, were represented in the campaign by people not of their race, but the Civic Betterment League, apparently desirous that there should be no confusion on that point, prepared a cartoon showing a Jewish gentleman wearing a halo and bearing the label "Till after election."

The Saturday night before election the movie studios at Hollywood poured out a small army of screen beauties who invaded Pomona in 50 automobiles. These light-hearted damsels chided the folk of Pomona on their old-fashioned ways. This was probably deserved, for there are still in Pomona hundreds of mothers of families who do not smoke cigarets at the family supper table. "Take the 'moan' out of Pomona and keep the 'sun' in Sunday," was the slogan of these women. They had their lines very well prepared.

And there was a great meeting in the interests of Gore Ramish and Sol Lesser, a very great meeting, and the Municipal Band, and—who do you think?—why, Doug Fairbanks, Wallace Reid, Jackie Coogan, Anita Stewart, and a lot of others who tried to pooh-pooh Pomona out of the idea of making the town clean. And who else do you think?—why Rupert Hughes!—you know Rupert Hughes, the author. He is under contract with Goldwyn, you know, another Jewish gentleman, and it was only natural that he should oblige. But he hardly seemed to be in the right place after all. Rupert didn't make a good argument—how could he? But it was a great meeting and it drew a monster crowd, with Anita and Douglas and Rupert and everybody, and with Gore Ramish and Sol Lesser discreetly absent.

The people of Pomona had a meeting too, but it wasn't so large. There were only the people of Pomona present, you see—no great movie stars to attract the public. Besides it was raining, and meetings for the public welfare always suffer from bad weather, as you doubtless have observed.

Well, the vote came, and Pomona won by 54.

Of course, there are threats of what may yet be done. Gore Ramish and Sol Lesser, through their representatives, have announced that they may take their shows right out of Pomona and leave the town flat! If they can't have shows on Sundays, they won't have shows on week-days! The answer to that is the installation of moving picture apparatus in the churches, and the fitting up of a theater in a Y. M. C. A. building.

Pomona is also told that the ordinance is unconstitutional—a trespass upon personal liberty. But people with sense know better. There is such a thing as personal liberty and there is such a thing as public rights. People have the liberty on Sunday to conduct themselves personally in any manner they like, so far as the fact of Sunday is concerned. They can fish, work in their gardens, tinker with their cars, ride, swim, play games—do anything that would be within their personal rights at other times.

But there is such a thing as public rights too. The right of an American community to a Sunday that is not destroyed as a day of rest and recreation by the commercialized activities of a bunch of people who do not believe in Sunday and who want to abolish Sunday—the right of American people to protect their

**THE** terrific reaction which has followed the use of the movies, the press, and the stage in propaganda derisive of the American Sunday, has been one of the most impressive recoils of this generation. The crowd of foreigners who control the stage and the movies overstepped their bounds, they imposed on good nature. Americans are now ready to practice a little intolerance; that is, to be less and less tolerant toward influences that are manifestly bent on turning the United States into a lower European state of thought.

own day and to maintain its character, is undisputed, and is written into the laws of most of the states. Personal liberty to the limit consistent with public rights—that is constitutional. Pomona has exercised its constitutional privilege as citizens of an American and Christian Republic to preserve its public rights on Sunday.

The idea is spreading. What Pomona can do, other towns can dare. The town of Laverne, four miles from Pomona, has drawn up an ordinance which will forestall the establishment there of a theater known to be destined for the control of the same Sunday-defying forces which brought Pomona to an issue. And all about that region there is a feeling that the country still belongs to the people, if they have interest enough in it to insist upon it.